

OPTIONAL EA, FONSI and DR FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: OR-035-04-07

BLM Office: Baker Resource Area

Lease/Serial/Case File No.

Proposed Action Title/Type: Lookout Mountain Aspen Regeneration

Location of Proposed Action: T. 11 S. R. 45 E. Secs 19 and 30

Applicant (if any): Bureau of Land Management, Vale District, Baker Field Office

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan:

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan.

Name of Plan: Baker Resource Management Plan **Date Approved:** 7/12/89

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Remarks:

Need for Proposed Action: See Attached documentation

Description of Proposed Action: Treat aspen stands by falling aspen and small ($\leq 6''$) conifer trees, under-burning, or a combination of falling trees and burning. Treatments to be used would be determined by the characteristics of individual stands, accessibility of the stands from nearby roads, and seasonal restrictions on prescribed fire. Approximately 60 acres will be treated in 2 separate stands. One stand is located near the end of Hibbard Cr road, just before the road fords the stream. The other stand is located off of Fox Cr road where the road crosses the stream (see map for detail). The healthiest trees would remain standing, often times falling the largest trees because these are the most decadent. Aspen trees that have “etchings” or “carvings” on their trunks would not be cut to preserve the history of these trees in the area

Protection of the treated stands would be conducted using different methods. These methods include, but are not limited to: barbed-wire fencing, electric fencing, temporary mesh fencing, and “jack-strawing” cut aspen trees. A portion of each of the treated stands would remain unprotected to aid in the determination of the most effective form or protection. Barbed-wire and electric fences would possibly be layed-down in the fall after cattle are out of the area so heavy snows don’t destroy the fence.

Environmental Impacts:

Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality		X	T & E Plants		X
ACECs		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Cultural Resources		X	Water Quality		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X
Floodplains		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
Native American Religious Concerns		X	Wilderness		X
T & E Animals		X			

Purpose and Need:

Aspen stands throughout northeastern Oregon have been declining over the past 100 years. Overgrazing and encroachment by conifers have contributed to this decline. Aspen stands provide important habitat for many species of wildlife including elk, deer, small mammals and birds. They are used throughout the year for food, foraging, nesting/dwelling and cover.

There are approximately 827 acres of aspen stands in the Lookout Mountain area that have been identified under the Lookout Mountain Forest and Rangeland Health Project Plan. These areas provide habitat for many wildlife species including: elk, mule deer, blue grouse, ruffed-grouse, turkey, and many species of songbirds. Due to the intense suppression of wildfire and continued grazing in the area, many of these aspen stands are becoming old and decadent. Without an intense disturbance and protection of the sprouts, the potential for these clones to die out is very high. Elk in the area are consistently pushed to private land during the hunting seasons and rarely return until the next spring. With the improvement of aspen stands in the area, the potential for elk to remain in the area on public land may be greater.

The proposed project area is unique in that it consists of many contiguous aspen stands over a large area and it is a unique habitat for the region, similar to aspen communities found in the Rocky Mountains.

Description of Impacts:**Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat**

Approximately 60 acres of aspen stands will be treated to enhance regeneration of aspen within these stands. This is approximately 7% of the acreage of aspen stands classified in the Lookout Mountain area.

There will be an immediate, short term disturbance to wildlife species located in the selected treatment areas. The habitat characteristics of these currently dense aspen stands would change to a more open stand following treatments. This would cause a decline in use of these areas by wildlife species that use dense forest and woodland habitats. However, after years of regeneration and the improved health of these woodlands, these species would return to the area.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts:

Following treatment, the stands would be protected from animal use and damage for a designated time period. The entire treated area would be protected from livestock use for 3 to 5 years following Baker RMP guidance. Protection of the area may be longer than 5 years, depending on the objectives being met and the current management of the area for livestock. The treated stands would be monitored to determine when they were ready for animal use. Maintenance on the protection measures would be conducted annually, probably by the grazing permittee in the area. Different methods of protection would be conducted in each of the treated stands. These methods include, but are not limited to: barbed-wire fencing, electric fencing, temporary mesh fencing, and “jack-strawing” cut aspen trees. A portion of each of the treated stands would remain unprotected to aid in the determination of the most effective form of protection. Barbed-wire and electric fences would possibly be laid-down in the fall after cattle are out of the area so heavy snows and falling aspen don’t destroy the fence. To mitigate impacts associated with potential sediment deposition into the streams; no prescribed fire will occur within 50 feet of Fox

Creek in the treatment areas. All tree fallen within 50 feet of the streams will remain in place to aid in sediment trapping along the streams.

The project area was surveyed in August and November, 1999 for cultural resources. All cultural resource sites in the vicinity would be avoided by excluding ground disturbance, and by inclusion within riparian buffers or fence exclosures. Aspen trees that have “etchings” or “carvings” more than 50 years old would not be cut. With site avoidance, the proposed treatment would have no effect on cultural resources.

Persons/Agencies Consulted:

Clair Button, Botanist, Baker Field Office

Mary Oman, Archeologist, Baker Field Office

Marc Pierce, Forester, Baker Field Office

Gary Guymon, Range Management Specialist, Baker Field Office

Preparer(s): _____

Date: 6/2/04

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Bureau of Land Management

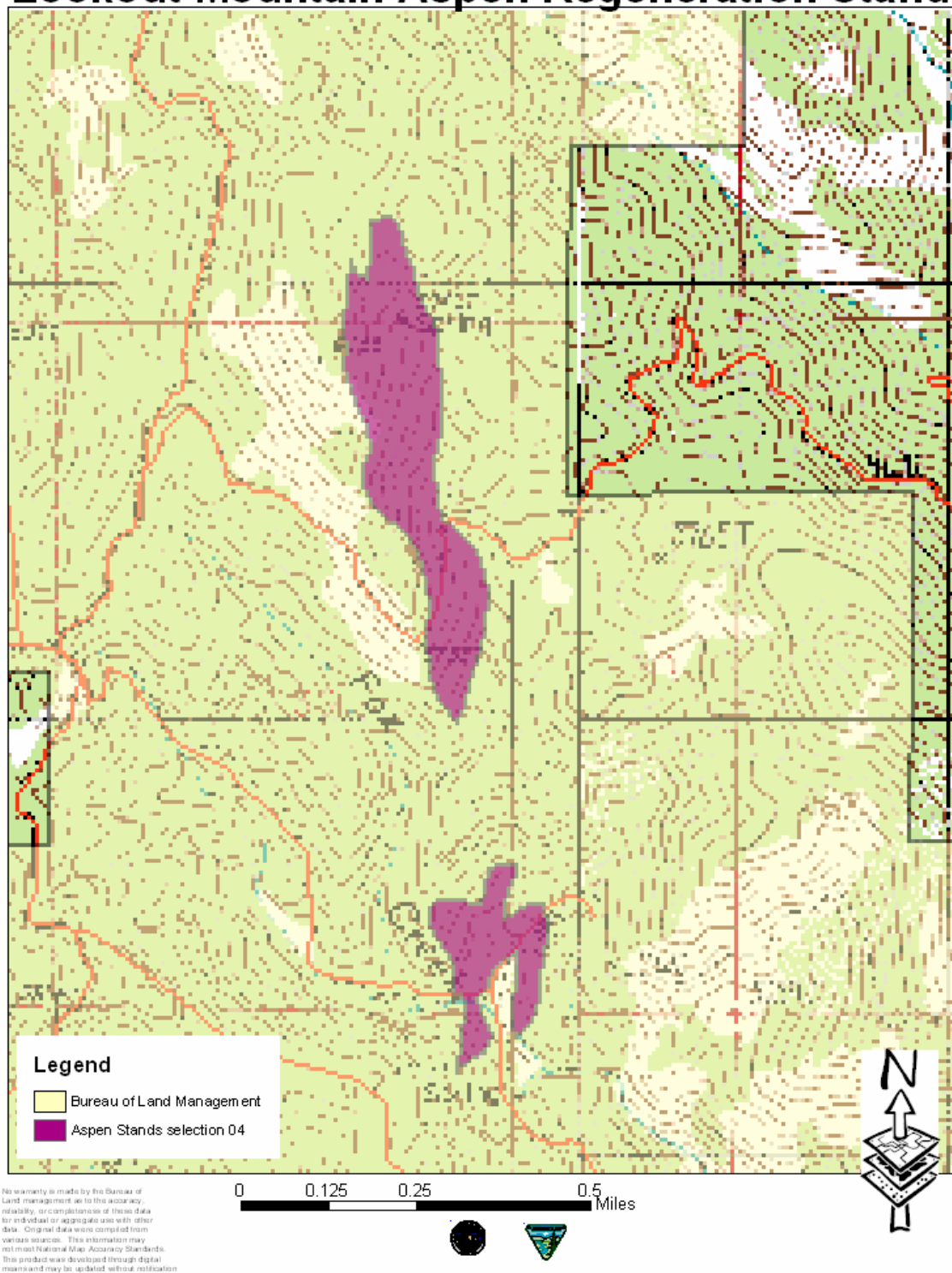
s/Penelope Dunn Woods

June 1, 2004

Baker Field Office Manager
Authorized Officer

Date

Lookout Mountain Aspen Regeneration Stands



Finding of No Significant Impacts

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment, OR-035-04-07, including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. The subject lands have been examined by resource area specialists in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and other statutes relevant to the proposal.

To the extent possible, management practices and design features that avoid or minimize environmental harm have been included in the proposal.

There are no significant adverse effects associated with any threatened, endangered or sensitive plants or wildlife as a result of this project. There would be no adverse effects resulting from the implementation of the proposed action on cultural resources.

Through the documentation in the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that the proposed action will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

s/Penelope Dunn Woods

Baker Field Office Manager
Authorized Officer

June 1, 2004

Date